

Naim Hanna Managing Director for the Middle East and Gulf, Pierre Fabre



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07.01.2020

Tags:

[UAE](#), [Dermo-Cosmetics](#), [Pierre Fabre](#), [MENA](#)

Pierre Fabre, the French dermo-cosmetics giant, is banking on its tradition of quality to continue disrupting the emerging markets. Naim Hanna, managing director for the Middle East and Gulf region, provides insights into the region's competitive landscape, analyzes the most recent consumer trends and explains

how the "Taking Care, Living Better" motto is transforming the company.

What are the main lessons you have learned throughout your extensive career in the Middle East, Africa and Central Europe for dermo-cosmetics companies?

When you travel and work and live in so many countries, you get to be versatile. You get to meet so many different profiles, channels of distribution and attitudes, but in the end, you are only serving one thing and one purpose: the patient and his or her quality of life. I have worked in the industry for many years and it always comes back to the patient, regardless of the country or market.

On a personal level, it allows you to reinforce soft skills and to develop cultural competency skills.

More recently, the digital revolution has been transforming the fields of health and beauty, opening up new innovation channels in the production and distribution of products. Also improving the

services and strengthening the connection with consumers.

What has been your focus since taking over the position in 2018?

The challenges in the region have been clear, we had to be present in markets where we were moved out because of external factors. The main objective is to regain our position in markets like Saudi Arabia, we had to gain proximity with the patients and consumers and develop solid marketing materials. Moreover, we have to remain working with Pierre Fabre's DNA, which is bringing medicalization to dermo-cosmetics. The change was to put the medication at the centre of our operation and be closer to the healthcare professionals.

This focus led to beautiful growth in KSA, and outstanding performance in Egypt for example.

Moreover, dermatological proximity generated the PIERRE FABRE academy and tremendous digital tool for dermatologists across the region to educate and help on developing their skills.

How do you adapt to the political instability in the region and diversify?

The region spreads over 13 countries and so does my responsibility, from Egypt to Iran. There are always surprises happening in every country and we have to adapt by taking conservative steps and understanding that there are certain external factors that come with the territory. We had a negative impact from the international sanctions on Iran, for example, and it has impacted the performance of the whole region. Iran was one of the biggest markets for us in the region, maybe because Iranian women are very keen on their beauty. Pierre Fabre was a pioneer in the country, and it was a rather big hit to us. It is hard to compensate for a country of the size of Iran, but we can accelerate other countries that were maybe not a priority in the past.

For now, the Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates' markets are the focus because they have the capacity to bring sizeable growth through their strong economies, stability and consumer habits.

Can you share with us some of the trends, opportunities and challenges awaiting in this region and what your strategy to face them?

Our job is to put the dermatology in the centre. It is true that we have other brands that are not tailor-made for dermatologists like Klorane or Galenic, but the biggest brands that we have in the region are Avène and Ducray, which are very close to the dermatology world. The practice of dermatology is evolving in the same direction and we are close to that environment. There are different consumers, habits and purchasing power, but it is surprising how much dermatologists are taking a lead across the different markets, and as I have mentioned before the PF Academy and other collaborations with the derms society is making us one of the preferred partners.

What is the company's footprint in the region, and can you highlight the affiliate's performance?

The region, as I mentioned, has been going through a difficult situation because of external factors. We suffered in 2018 but are regaining our standing in 2019 and 2020 is going to be the year of

Pierre Fabre. We are going to concentrate on using the DNA of the Pierre Fabre group, putting the patient first. I remind you that Pierre Fabre group has wide portfolio from oncology to ethical drugs to Dermo cosmetics.

The pharmacies have incredible weight in the Gulf region and the Middle East in general because, traditionally, the pharmacy was the centre of beauty. Skincare is still sold primarily in pharmacies in the Saudi market, haircare is sold in pharmacies in Lebanon and Egypt, to put a few examples. There are consumption trends that will make our brands the centre of the cosmetics environment.

In terms of products, we have the complete portfolio in the region, but it depends on the country. We have eight brands and are trying to bring the perfect brand to the perfect consumer in the right market. That is the new approach.

So, our presence and footprint in the region is strong with a complete catalogue answering different needs and profiles of patients.

Do you perceive that consumers in the region value the quality of your products?

Yes, but brand recognition varies depending on the country. For Avène, the consumers, patients and doctors, value what we bring to the market in terms of quality of life to the patients, at the end when you're soothing sensitive skin with AVENE patients and doctors will value all the dimensions of the brand.

Pierre Fabre is owned by a foundation, a nonprofit organization, and has a new slogan that reflects our mission: Taking Care, Living Better. It is how we are helping healthcare professionals; On the other hand, the Foundation is providing medical assistance to people in need like Syrian refugees. When you are owned by a foundation, people are proud to work for you; not to mention the innovative aspect of Pierre Fabre.

Corporate social responsibility is at the heart of the group. We have what we call the Green Mission and the group is going to continue developing green products, reducing our CO2 emissions and satisfying consumers that look for natural ingredients.

All those values are being communicated and dimensioned in the products. I believe that yes HCP are valuing the quality of our products and mission.

How are you working to increase awareness about Pierre Fabre and the company products in the Middle East and Gulf?

The awareness in the medical environment is extremely high because we are in contact with almost every dermatologist in the region. However, for consumers, the awareness is not as high as with other brands that are communicating through mass media because we are not a mass product. I can say that the size of the dermo-cosmetic market in the Gulf region is big, which means two things: the pharmacy has the power and our brands as well. We get to consumers in the region through doctors and the e-world.

We have our e-platforms and e-social platforms as well that gives us an edge in creating awareness and interacting with our clients.

Looking towards the future, where will Pierre Fabre be in five years in the Middle East?

Pierre Fabre was one of the first dermo-cosmetics brands in the region and it has a leadership position in countries like Qatar, Lebanon and Jordan. We have not used all of the tools at our disposal because of some external bumps in the road, but I am confident that we have everything to be number one in the region in the next three years. That is our objective.

What motivates you to continue working with Pierre Fabre?

Passion. If you do not believe in the values of the group, you cannot work for the group. I enjoy what I do and have always liked being in this environment throughout my career. The team we have ensembled is very young and that motivates me, it has the feeling of working at a startup with unmatched potential.

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